MINISTRY OF ENVIRONMENT AND FORESTS (SHRI KAMAL NATH): (a) No, Sir.

(b) The total number of wild buffaloes in the country is estimated to be 2605.

(c) Steps taken/proposed to be taken to protect the existing populations of the Asiatic wild buffalo and to facilitate its breeding include:

(i) The wild buffalo is included in Schedule I of the Wild Life (Protection) Act, thus giving the species maximum possible legal protection.

(ii) The existing habitats of the wild buffalo are all part of protected area networks comprising national parks and wildlife sanctuaries, where all wildlife, including the wild buffalo, is given adequate protection and conditions are made congenial for the species to breed freely in its natural habitats.

(iii) Assistance under the Centrally sponsored schemes : 'Project Tiger', 'Assistance for the development of national parks and sanctuaries' and 'Conservation of rhinos in Assam' is extended to the above protected areas for their development, including measures to prevent poaching, encroachments and fires.

(iv) Survey and research are being conducted to locate the genetically pure populations of wild buffaloes and to develop prescriptions for their scientific management and protection of these valuable gene-pools.

(v) Domestic cattle living around the protected areas of Assam is inoculated against contagious diseases.

Scientific Research on Monkeys, Rabbits etc.

@*218. SHRI KRISHAN LAL SHARMA : Will the Minister of HEALTH AND FAMILY WELFARE be pleased to state :

(a) whether it is a fact that scientific research is being carried out in the country on monkeys, rabbits and mice etc. for non-essential purposes;

(b) if so, the details thereof; and

(c) the steps Government propose to take to ban the research on these species for non-essential purposes and to avoid cruelty to these species?

THE MINISTER OF HEALTH AND FAMILY WELFARE (SHRI M. L. FOTEDAR): (a) to (c) The use of certain animals in bio-medical research is unavoidable and the same is globally accepted. The use of experimental animals for bio-medical research is necessary for understanding basic and fundamental mechanism in physiology, pathology, pharmacology and allied branches as also for conducting pre-clinical safety efficacy, toxicological studies on food toxins and additives.

Monkeys, rabbits, mice, guinea pigs etc. are used in bio-medical researches conducted intramurally and extramurally by the Indian Council of Medical Research. The protocol for such research studies are carefully scrutinised by the Scientific Advisory Committee of the 26 permanent Institutes of the Indian Council of Medical Research and by the Project Review Committee for the extramural research projects, which are funded by ICMR. These pre-review committees ensure that experimental animals are used only when absolutely essential.

Constant efforts are made to ensure that animals do not suffer unduly during experimentation and they are killed painlessly and quickly when they have to be sacrificed for bio-medical research.

@ Previously Starred Question 138, transferred from the 5th March, 1992.